



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Southeast Region

SOUTHEASTERN CURRENTS

SEPTEMBER 2007 NEWSLETTER

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The Senate of Puerto Rico recognizes pioneer conservationist of the Puerto Rican parrot

On June 19, the Senate of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico unanimously passed Resolution 3243 recognizing José Antonio Rodríguez Vidal for his ground-breaking study of the Puerto Rican parrot. On July 17, a special ceremony was held at the Commonwealth Capitol to honor him.

Mr. José A. Rodríguez Vidal receiving Resolution 3243 for his pioneering work on the Puerto Rican Parrot from Kenneth McClintock, Senate President of Puerto Rico. Also pictured are Nereida Rodríguez, wife of José A. Rodríguez Vidal; Marisel Lopez, FWS Project Leader for the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program; and Edwin Muñiz, Field Supervisor for the FWS Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office. Photo by Pablo Torres.

“I realized the Senate needed to recognize Mr. Rodríguez Vidal on behalf of Puerto Rico when I attended the recent Grand Opening of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Iguaca Aviary, said Kenneth McClintock, President of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. If it wasn’t for the work he did in the 1950’s, when it wasn’t popular to be an environmentalist, this parrot would be extinct today.”

During the ceremony at the Commonwealth Capitol and the Service surprised Rodríguez Vidal with a pair of Puerto Rican parrots on display. This was the first visit of these endemic and critically endangered birds to the Capitol of Puerto Rico, and they highlighted the contribution of Rodríguez Vidal.

Rodríguez Vidal’s vision, dedication, and leadership led to the federal listing of this bird as an endangered animal and to the establishment of the Puerto Rican Parrot Recovery Program involving the Service, the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, the USDA Forest Service, and other partners. At 82 years of age, Rodríguez Vidal expressed gratitude and shared amazing stories of his experiences with the parrots in the wild.

The staff of the Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office expressed their admiration to Rodríguez Vidal by presenting him with a picture of himself with a Puerto Rican Parrot. The photo was taken on April 28, at the Iguaca Aviary Grand Opening, as Rodríguez Vidal symbolically released the bird into a flight cage that is dedicated to him. The artwork was signed by biologists who are following in his footsteps by working to save the Puerto Rican parrot.

Submitted by Lilibeth Serrano, Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office

Behind the Scenes--



Volunteer firefighters were put to the test when a "car wreck" started another wildfire (indicated by smoke bombs). FWS Photo.

Lake Phelps wildfire drill

FIRE! Well, not really. But 42 people from eight agencies did turn out with lights whirling on Saturday, August 11, for a wildland-urban interface fire drill on Lake Phelps in North Carolina. The simulated wildfire was burning on Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and "threatened" structures. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service organized the drill with help from the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources (NCDFR) and Washington County Emergency Management. Drill participants included Pocosin Lakes and Alligator River refuges ; the NCDFR; Lake Phelps, Pungo River, Creswell, Roper, and Tyrrell Volunteer Fire Departments (VFD); and Washington County Emergency Management, EMS and Fire Marshal.

While refuge employees and NCDFR controlled the wildfire, VFD resources were assigned structure protection. Role players (spotter plane, tractor-plow operators, Incident Commander, and Operations Chief) used radio traffic to keep the scenario going with updates to participants on fire behavior and suppression efforts. The "wildfire" eventually spotted across the road and advanced on the houses. VFDs used their training to extinguish several spot fires, indicated by smoke bombs, which threatened the housing area. Assigned observers also threw kinks into the scenario that participants had to handle. These included a flat tire on an engine, a smoke induced car wreck with injuries and a roadside fire, and a "heart attack" suffered by a volunteer firefighter from his suppression efforts.

The drill lasted about 3 hours before everyone converged under the picnic shelter. An After-Action Review highlighted the lessons learned about communications, county emergency management responses, and fire department standard operating procedures. It was an excellent exercise in use of the Incident Command System and a great relationship-building experience among the local, state and federal firefighters. The Service hopes to do more such drills at Pocosin Lakes and other national wildlife refuges in the area to improve efficiency and integration of efforts between cooperators when fighting wildland fires. The drill finished with a great summer picnic of fried chicken and watermelon. The funding for the drill came from the Department of the Interior's Ready Reserve Program. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Kelly Van Druten, Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Manteo, North Carolina

Dan Tabberer Memorial Boat Launch dedicated at Bogue Chitto

The Fish and Wildlife Service dedicated the Dan Tabberer Memorial Boat Launch on July 13, 2007 at Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge located near Slidell, Louisiana.

Daniel Keith Tabberer "Tab"(1946-2004) was instrumental in establishing the 37,000-acre Bogue Chitto refuge in 1980. He was the first refuge manager, wildlife biologist, and refuge forester for the refuge.



Dan Tabberer's family at the dedication. Photo by Pon Dixon.

"This was the site Dan used as a get away, a fellowship tool for youth groups to get in touch with nature, and as a reward for me when the work was done," said Dan's son Benjamin (Ben) Tabberer as he remembered times with his dad on the refuge. "For Dan, the area was the beginning of many expeditions for seclusion, fellowship, and bonding."

The launch gives easier access for the public to enjoy the same things Dan did. The launch and parking area was built through a partnership between Mississippi Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Pearl River County, Mississippi, donations from Friends of Dan Tabberer, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Submitted by Daniel Breaux, Southeast Louisiana Refuges, Lacombe, Louisiana

Bragging Rights --



STEP biotech Christina Legleu shows the group still image video of bears from one of the many trail cameras located throughout the refuge. Photo by Barret Fortier.

Louisiana Black Bear Teacher's Workshop a success

Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge staff participated in the Louisiana Black Bear Teacher's Workshop in July. This three-day event is held annually in south central Louisiana through cooperation between the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Black Bear Conservation Committee, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Twelve Louisiana educators participated. The purpose of this course is to inform educators about the ecology of the threatened Louisiana black bear, habitat use, home ranges, population dynamics, ongoing fieldwork, and most importantly, bear-human interactions. The Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge staff was responsible for the field trip portion of the workshop where the group observed habitat, field techniques for monitoring, and foraging locations of the coastal subpopulation of the Louisiana black bear.

Submitted by Barret Fortier, Mandalay/Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuges, Franklin, Louisiana

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery celebrates Smokey Bear's birthday

Saturday, August 4, was a day of celebration and fun as the staff of Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery celebrated a famous icon's birthday – Smokey Bear! Although Smokey's actual birthday was Thursday, August 9, the hatchery decided to make a weekend event by partnering with the Kentucky Division of Forestry. More than 70 people of all ages came to the hatchery to wish Smokey, who turned 63, a happy birthday. Birthday cake and lots of goodies were available for all guests, along with plenty of helpful fire safety information. Everyone in attendance also got a chance to tour the new Visitor/Environmental Education Center.



Smokey tries his best to sneak a few fish from the hatchery raceway. Photo by Amanda Patrick.

While on hand, Smokey expressed his interest in catching a few fish and tried his hand at fishing in the hatchery raceways.



Kentucky Division of Forestry Personnel Kenny Pyles along with Wolf Creek NFH employee Chris Murphy pose with the famous birthday boy himself! Photo by Amanda Patrick.

event a success!

Wolf Creek wishes to express its gratitude to the Kentucky Division of Forestry for its help in making the



The first Ochlockonee moccasinshell seen in 14 years, tagged and ready to be replaced in the Ochlockonee River. Photo by Nate Johnson.

Rediscovery of the endangered Ochlockonee moccasinshell

"I got one," someone shouted when they found the freshly dead shell of an endangered Ochlockonee moccasinshell in the Ochlockonee River. Nobody had seen a live individual in 14 years, and only three live specimens had been collected since 1974. Biologists from the Panama City, Florida Ecological Services and Fisheries Field Office, University of Florida, and Georgia Department of Natural Resources continued to search until they found two live individuals, one of which was relatively small and likely about two years old. The evidence suggests the species continues to hang on and is reproducing. Now that an extant population has been found, recovery actions can be targeted to protect this mussel's habitat.



Karen Herrington tags an Ochlockonee moccasinshell while Jim Williams and Nate Johnson (University of Florida) continue to search for more mussels. Photo by Sandy Pursiful.

Submitted by Karen Herrington, Panama City Ecological Services and Fisheries Field Office, Florida



Volunteer John Inzetta removes tallow. Photo by Denise Williams.

Supporters of St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge help tackle Chinese Tallow

St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge is using an integrated pest management approach to clear a 10-acre manifestation of Chinese Tallow from a remote section of St. Vincent Island. On August 4, three volunteers and Thom Lewis, wildlife biologist at the refuge, pulled and cut approximately 6,000 Chinese Tallow seedlings and saplings. Another 3,000 seedlings and saplings were removed by a 10-man prison crew on August 7. Hundreds of larger trees were treated on the island this Spring. Progress is being made in this removal effort which employs prescribed fire, mechanical control, and herbicide treatment. Four previous infestations in other areas of the refuge have been successfully controlled over the past few years. More photos in [Photo Album](#).

Submitted by Thom Lewis, St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge, Apalachicola, Florida

Fish weir helps researchers study shad spawning

In January 2006, the Lowell Dam was removed on the Little River in North Carolina by Restoration Systems, a Raleigh based company that specializes in environmental restoration and mitigation. To help study the effects of dam removal on fish migration on the river, a fish weir was installed during the 2007 spring spawning season at the old dam site. Joshua Raabe, a graduate student at North Carolina State University, oversees the project which is part of a study by the North Carolina Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at North Carolina State University. Funding for the project was provided by Restoration Systems and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Fish weir on Little River Photo by Mike Wicker.



Joshua Raabe (center) checks the fish weir. Photo by Mike Wicker.

Migratory fishes such as American and hickory shad live most of their lives in the ocean, but spawn in coastal rivers. Dams and other obstructions on rivers prohibit the fish from migrating to their spawning grounds and have caused a significant decline in anadromous fish populations in North Carolina. The placement of the weir on the river during spawning season allows researchers to record the types and numbers of fish moving up the river where Lowell Dam once stood. The weir is designed so that fish are herded in two cages where they are released each morning after being recorded. The weir is made of plywood and PVC, and it is designed to allow canoes and other small boats to float over it. The weir will be in place again during the next spawning season from March to May 2008.

“During 2007, the highest spawning activity occurred between April 23 and May 3 when the researchers collected data on 372 American shad,” said Raabe. “Most of these were moving downstream, and it was clear from the condition of the females that spawning events had occurred,” said Raabe. “A few of the shad were tagged individuals that we had handled at the weir earlier in the season, and it was great to recapture these and see how long they had been in the upstream habitat.”

Submitted by Patty Matteson, Raleigh, North Carolina Ecological Services Field Office

Coastal Plain portion of North Carolina Birding Trail open

In June, the grand opening of the recently completed Coastal Plain portion of the North Carolina Birding Trail was celebrated at Hammock’s Beach State Park. The North Carolina Birding Trail is a driving trail that links great birding sites across the state. A multi-agency effort, the trail is being implemented in three components - coast, piedmont and mountains.

The Coastal Plain portion of the trail has 102 sites where visitors can experience exceptional birding. Site descriptions are already available at the following website: www.ncbirdingtrail.org or by telephoning 1-919-604-5183. A 172-page spiral-bound North Carolina Birding Trail guide book is available through the North Carolina Wild Store, www.ncwildlife.org/fs_index_09_wild.htm, or by calling 866-945-3746. The retail price of the guide is \$10.



Visitors on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, one of the eight refuges located on the Coastal Plain portion of the trail. Photo by Melissa McGaw.

Submitted by Patty Matteson, Raleigh, North Carolina Ecological Services Field Office



A pair of Red-cockaded woodpeckers. Male top right. Photo by Mike Lennartz.

City of Boiling Spring Lakes and its partners receive planning grant

The City of Boiling Spring Lakes, North Carolina, and its partners recently received a \$106,745 Habitat Conservation Planning Assistance Grant. The grant will allow the city and its partners to proceed with the development of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) which will help protect the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

In addition to the RCW, the HCP will also help safeguard the habitat of the endangered rough-leaved loosestrife. There also are 12 more federal and state species of concern such as the Venus flytrap, the yellow fringeless orchid, the Carolina gopher frog, the Southern hognose snake, and the savanna indigo bush that depend on the longleaf pine ecosystem prevalent in Boiling Spring Lakes.

An HCP Steering Committee was formed this spring involving The Nature Conservancy, The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, the city of Boiling Spring Lakes, city residents, the Brunswick County Board of Realtors and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. State and federal elected officials also assisted these partners. State Representative Bonner Stiller, representing the 17th District, introduced a House Bill 1152 that would authorize the City of Boiling Spring Lakes to participate in and fund a habitat conservation plan for the red cockaded woodpecker and other endangered species as a public enterprise.

Submitted by Patty Matteson, Raleigh, North Carolina Ecological Services Field Office

President Bush sports Okefenokee fire cap while praising work of all fire fighters

On May 29, President Bush arrived in Brunswick, Georgia., where he was scheduled to tour the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center or FLETC. Shortly after arriving at the Brunswick Golden Isles Airport, President Bush gave a short speech at the Airport Fire Station. In it, he acknowledged the hard work and sacrifices made by all of the fire fighters in battling the many fires in Georgia. Prior to leaving the fire station, Mr. Chris Wilcox, Operations Commander for the South Western Area Type I Incident Management Team, presented the President with information about the Big Turnaround Complex of Wildfires and a special black Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge Fire Management ball cap, which had his name embossed on the back. George Constantino, manager of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, made it a point to have the cap presented to the President, because he felt it symbolized the team effort of federal, state, and private resources working together to suppress the Big Turnaround Complex. President Bush wore the cap and posed for photographs, then wore it to the FLETC center.



President George W. Bush arrives at Brunswick Golden Isles Airport, Brunswick, Georgia. Walking with firefighters to Airport Fire Station No. 5 for Briefing on Georgia and Florida wildfires. White House photo by Eric Draper.

Submitted by Shawn Gillette, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Folkston, Georgia



Hats Off --

Five employees receive DOI Meritorious Service Awards at Project Leaders Meeting



Ed Buskirk receives his award from Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. Photo by Tom Mackenzie.

Edward Buskirk:

Ed Buskirk's career has been marked by his commitment to excellence in the improved administration of the Service's fiscal resources and business operations, including planning, budgeting, and financial management. His superb accomplishments have not only impacted the Southeast Region, but have had a profound effect on the budgetary and financial management processes and practices across the Service.

Robert Currie:

Robert Currie has championed the protection and recovery of endangered species and their habitat nationwide for more than 20 years. He worked with a variety of external partners throughout the United States to design and construct barriers that restrict human access to caves and mines while allowing bats to pass. Robert was instrumental in the production of several acclaimed publications and several posters on bats and karst resources. He was a member of the Bat Conservation and Mining Steering Group that received the Department of the Interior's Environmental Achievement Award in 2005. In addition, Robert's work with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to reintroduce the peregrine falcon in the southern Appalachians contributed to its recovery and delisting.



Robert Currie receives award from Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. Photo by Tom Mackenzie.



Larry Mallard receives his award from Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. Photo by Tom Mackenzie.

Larry Mallard:

Larry has served the Fish and Wildlife Service for more than 37 years. As project leader for the White River National Wildlife Refuge, he was instrumental in developing the Cooks Lake Partnership, a 1,872-acre development with the Arkansas Game and Fish Foundation and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for educational, youth, and mobility-impaired outdoor activities. Larry promoted and supported cultural investigations on the refuge and was honored with the McGimsey Preservation Award of 2001 by the Archaeological Society for outstanding contributions to the preservation of Arkansas heritage. The Wallace Bottoms site, found in 1998, ranks with Jamestown in its significance for colonial era American history. Excavations have been accomplished through partnership between the refuge, the National Park Service, the Arkansas Archaeological Society, and the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma. Larry and the refuge were also thrust into one of the largest conservation issues of the past century -- the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed woodpecker. Larry sought out local and regional leaders to gain support and public meetings for local citizens about the Ivory-bill and has given numerous media interviews as well as programs for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission to ensure management actions were well coordinated.

Laura Rogers:

Laura Rogers has provided outstanding service to the Asheville, North Carolina Ecological Services Field Office for more than 26 years. Laura is extremely adept at managing budget funds to achieve maximum benefit for unusual projects. She helped other offices collocate staff and set up new offices. Laura also expertly managed the Asheville Field Office's many relocations. She worked with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to establish two DOT-funded positions in the Asheville office. and played a key role in the success of the 2004 Red-cockaded Woodpecker Symposium. Laura also compiled an intra-office policies handbook for all Asheville Field Office employees.



Laura Rogers with Cindy Dohner, Deputy Regional Director, and Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. Photo by Tom Mackenzie.

Gail Carmody: (no photo)

Gail Carmody has served more than 13 years as the Field Supervisor of the Panama City Field Office where she has provided outstanding leadership in both the Service's Fisheries Resources and Ecological Services Programs. Gail is an expert in developing working relationships with partners at the city, county, state, and federal levels in the Florida panhandle. She is recognized as an outstanding manager and has maintained a team of highly motivated and talented people who set a national example for how the Service and its partners can achieve remarkable strides in the conservation of America's most sensitive biological resources.

Southeast Regional Director presents stewardship awards at Project Leader's Meeting

The Regional Director's Stewardship Award is given to an employee or field office that has accomplished the extraordinary for the conservation of natural resources in the Southeast Region. Stewardship awards were presented to:



George Constantino with Cindy Dohner, Deputy Southeast Regional Director, and Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. Photo by Tom Mackenzie.

George Constantino and Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge staff:

Refuge Manager George Constantino and the entire staff of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge worked in extreme conditions during multiple fires which combined to become the largest fire in the history of the 48 contiguous States. George and his heroic staff coordinated efforts with three Type One Incident Command Teams, one Type Two Team, hundreds of resources and personnel from across the nation, multiple aircraft resources, agencies from two States, and private landowners.

Mark Musaus:

Mark Musaus provided excellent leadership in preserving and protecting the Everglades as Project Leader of the A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Mark's leadership strengthened the multi-agency partnerships in the Everglades aimed at water quality and invasive-species management. The refuge's extensive invasive-exotic-control program continues to be the main driver for addressing the Service's annual invasive species goals. Mark also established an active and successful prescribed fire program. In June 2003, 2,300 acres were burned under prescription, the first interior burn on the Refuge in 20 years. In subsequent years, the Refuge burned more than 17,000 acres under prescription. For Visitor Services, Mark helped start the Everglades Day Celebration. This annual event is in its' eighth year and attracts 3,500 people each year.



Mark Musaus with Cindy Dohner, Deputy Southeast Regional Director, and Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. Photo by Tom Mackenzie



Ralph Costa with Cindy Dohner, Deputy Southeast Regional Director, and Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. Photo by Tom Mackenzie

Ralph Costa:

Ralph Costa has worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service since 1991, serving as the red-cockaded woodpecker recovery coordinator. In this capacity, Ralph has been a valuable, innovative, and influential leader in the woodpecker's management and recovery. He has been a leader in charting management direction and coordination among Refuges and landowners. Ralph also has provided support and guidance to military installations ranging from Texas to North Carolina, setting the standard for red-cockaded woodpecker population growth rates. He chairs the Southern Range Translocation Cooperative between the Service, the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Forest Service, and other Federal, State, and private partners in Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Ralph also has promoted the use of Safe Harbor Agreements throughout the red-cockaded woodpecker's range. His efforts have seen the establishment of statewide red-cockaded woodpecker conservation and Safe

Harbor programs in eight states.

Three DOI Superior Service Awards presented at Project Leader's Meeting

Jeffrey Bricken:

Jeffrey Bricken has served the Service for more than 18 years, in a career distinguished by his professionalism and outstanding contributions to the National Wildlife Refuge System. As Refuge Manager at Eufaula Refuge, He replaced most of the pumping stations and water-control structures. At Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge he instituted an innovative upland habitat management program involving the removal of unproductive refuge croplands and the institution of high quality habitat for a variety of birds and small game species. One of Jeffrey's greatest accomplishments has been revitalizing the Refuge Friends group to greater involvement in activities from butterfly walks and night prowls to county-funded youth environmental education programs.



Southeast Regional Director Sam Hamilton presents award to Jeffrey Bricken. Photo by Tom Mackenzie.



Southeast Regional Director Sam Hamilton presents award to William Mellor. Photo by Tom Mackenzie.

William Mellor:

As a Fish and Wildlife Service criminal investigator and pilot, Special Agent William Mellor has successfully protected migratory birds, endangered species, and other wildlife resources for nearly three decades. With more than 2,100 migratory game bird cases to his credit, Agent Mellor has effectively combated the exploitation of waterfowl resources, preserving populations that represent a national treasure. Agent Mellor worked waterfowl cases on the ground and from the air, logging more than 4,000 hours of low-level flight over a three-state area. His success in exposing seafood companies trafficking in unlawfully harvested redfish prompted passage of new, more effective laws to protect redfish populations in the Gulf of Mexico.

Deborah Vess:

Deborah Vess has demonstrated exceptional capability and commitment in supporting national and regional implementation of the Service's Shaping the Future initiative and implementing the national Data Tracking System in the Southeast Region. She has managed and coordinated these labor- and detail-intensive special projects while maintaining her overall job performance as Executive Assistant.



Deputy Regional Director Cindy Dohner and Southeast Regional Director Sam Hamilton present award to Deborah Vess. Photo by Tom Mackenzie

Two employees receive DOI Distinguished Service Awards at Project Leaders Meeting

The Distinguished Service Award was established in 1948. It is the highest Departmental honor award granted to career employees of the Department.



Charles Baxter receives his award from Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director. Photo by Tom Mackenzie

Charles Baxter:

Charles Baxter has accepted increasingly challenging leadership assignments at geographically and programmatically diverse Service offices. The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture Office continues to gain renown as a leader in cutting-edge conservation initiatives for the Fish and Wildlife Service and the conservation community throughout North America. Working at landscape level, Charlie empowers Service partners through the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture framework and other unique ways to forge a conservation alliance which is fully embraced by myriad partners. The result is a nationally acclaimed cooperation, much to the credit of his deft leadership and guidance. Charlie also has distinguished himself among his peers in fostering the emerging West Gulf Coast Joint Venture, leading and facilitating the new National Ecological Assessment Team, making unique contributions to ivory-billed woodpecker recovery efforts, forging a progressive relationship with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and contributing to a new model for an effective science alliance with the U.S.

Geological Survey.

Dennis Widner:

Dennis Widner had a thirty-five-year career with the Fish and Wildlife Service, working to conserve, protect, and enhance natural resources on National Wildlife Refuges in Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana. At Savannah Coastal Refuges, Dennis's research resulted in the removal of the Savannah Harbor Tide Gate and a salt-water wedge, saving and restoring more than four thousand acres of fresh-water marsh. At Big Lake Refuge, Dennis headed a restoration project that reinvigorated the lake aquatic system and restored more than eight thousand acres of valuable fish and wildlife habitat. He then repeated this success at Wapanocca Lake. As a champion of bottomland hardwood reforestation, Dennis advocated hardwood reforestation through the planting of acorns and seeds in areas throughout Arkansas, specifically in the Wetland Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Program. He managed the reforestation of tracts at the Cache River Refuge with native oaks, cypress, gum, and pecan. When the 2005 announcement of the rediscovery of the ivory-billed woodpecker placed the Department and the Service in the conservation spotlight, Dennis was instrumental in establishing partnerships, hosting meetings, and supporting the bird's protection.



Dennis Widner with Cindy Dohner, Deputy Regional Director, and Sam Hamilton, Southeast Regional Director

Photo Album --

Supporters of St.Vincent National Wildlife Refuge help tackle Chinese Tallow -- photo



Tallow seedlings Photo by Thom Lewis.



Tallow Crew: L- R: Thom Lewis, John Inzetta, Lynda Smith, and Denise Williams. Photo by Monica Harris.

Lake Phelps wildfire drill -- photo



Volunteer firefighters receive a briefing from the FWS' Vince Carver after check-in with Washington County Emergency Management. Photo by Howard Phillips.



EMS and volunteer firefighters treat a volunteer firefighter who suffered a simulated heart attack in the midst of the wildfire drill. FWS Photo.



Members of the Lake Phelps Volunteer Fire Department get hoses ready in anticipation of the "wildfire" heading their way. Credit: Kelley Van Druten.



Kelley Van Druten leads an after action review to discuss lessons learned during the wildfire drill. Photo by Howard Phillips.



The Saturday drill was completed with a great summer picnic of fried chicken and watermelon. Photo by Kelley Van Druten.

Visitor Services --

Marc Dupuy Jr. Wildlife Trail designated a National Recreation Trail



Entrance to the trail. Photo by Mindy Gautreaux.

The Central Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex announces the Marc Dupuy, Jr. Wildlife Trail, located at Grand Cote National Wildlife Refuge near Marksville, Louisiana, has been designated a National Recreation Trail by the Secretary of the Interior. This National Trail designation comes as one of 40 trails designated this year across the United States and is the only National Recreation Trail located in the state of Louisiana.



View of paved portion of the trail. Photo by Mindy Gautreaux.

The Marc Dupuy, Jr. Wildlife Trail was opened to the public in March 2006 and consists of a half-mile, asphalt trail that winds through forested wetlands and connects to a boardwalk which guides visitors to an elevated observation tower. There are several interpretive panels that provide information about the wildlife and plants found on the refuge, and benches are provided along the way for rest stops. The observation tower overlooks wetland management areas where waterfowl, wading birds, and mammals may be viewed in their natural surroundings by two telescopes, one of which is wheelchair accessible. There is also an unpaved route that leads back to the asphalt path for those who want a more “off the beaten path” experience. The trail is handicapped-accessible and is open to the public free of charge, seven days a week, during daylight hours.



View of boardwalk portion of the trail. Photo by Mindy Gautreaux.

National Recreation Trails are components of the National Trail System and recognize already existing trails that connect people to natural resources and improve the quality of their life. The program is jointly administered by the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program and the U.S. Forest Service in conjunction with other federal and non-profit partners, notably American Trails. Each of the trails inducted into the system receives a certificate of designation and trail markers. They join a network that contains more than 11,000 miles of trails across the United States. More information may be found at <http://www.nps.gov/rtca>.



Another view of the ducks. Photo by Mindy Gautreaux.



View of ducks from the boardwalk. Photo by Mindy Gautreaux.

Submitted by Mindy Gautreaux, Central Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Marksville, Louisiana

Wage Grade Profile --

Stiner Jones: Inspecting damage in the wake of the fire at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge



Stiner Jones clears fallen timber from canoe trails. Photo by Spencer Crews.

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge tractor operator Stiner Jones carefully maneuvered his boat between the massive trunks of fallen cypress trees as he navigated through a narrow channel of Minnie's Run. Jones, a wage grade employee with 24 years of experience working at the refuge, has navigated these waters thousands of times, but this time was different. In May, the Bugaboo Scrub Wildfire, part of the much larger Big Turnaround Complex of wildfires, passed through this particular section of the refuge's Wilderness trail system, burning much of the swamp, and damaging many of the cypress trees, which have fallen across the trails, impeding, and in some cases, completely blocking access on them. Jones' job is to scout the fire-damaged trails to see what work needs to be done. Most of the trails have been closed since the fire, and now that the threat is reduced, the refuge is trying to reopen some of the more popular runs. Low water levels, already a factor before the fires, made this reconnaissance trip more difficult. Yet, Jones was able to reach his objective. His three-mile trek may seem insignificant; but, when you consider that (1) the fire still continues to burn in the northwest corner of the swamp, and (2) every yard of the more than 120 miles of trail must be completely evaluated in terms of visitor safety before a decision can be made to reopen it to the public, his progress reaching Minnie's Run is a significant achievement.

"Inspecting this massive trail system is like eating an elephant," Jones says with a grin, "one bite at a time."

Submitted by Shawn Gillette, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Folkston, Georgia